



Class Size Reduction

FEA Policy Position

**A Work Product of the
FEA Class Size Reduction Work Group**

Membership
Maureen Dinnen, FEA President
Don Allen
Terrie Brady
Jean Clements
Joann Kilpatrick
Sheila Olsen
Jeff Siskind
Pam Cooper
Michael Monroe
Marshall Ogletree
Kevin Watson

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OVERVIEW

On November 5, 2002, Florida voters approved Amendment 9 to reduce class sizes in grades prekindergarten through 12th grade with established maximum limits in place by the beginning of the 2010 school year. Those maximums are as follows:

- 1) 18 students assigned to a public school teacher in prekindergarten through grade 3.
- 2) 22 students assigned to a public school teacher in grades 4 through 8.
- 3) 25 students assigned to a public school teacher in grades 9 through 12.

The class size requirements are not applicable to extracurricular classes but what constitutes an extracurricular class is not defined in the amendment. Also the requirement is the responsibility of the state and not the local school districts. Furthermore, beginning in the 2003-04 school year, funds should be provided to reduce the average number in each classroom by at least two students per year until the maximum limits are not exceeded.

BELIEF STATEMENT

FEA believes that the passage of the Class Size Reduction amendment together with the Universal Pre-K and the Florida Higher Education Governing Board amendments provide an unparalleled opportunity for Florida to focus on what it will take to improve the quality of our K-20 education systems. Thus, the amendment to reduce class size should be implemented with a coordinated strategy designed to promote an agenda of quality public schools, to improve student learning and to maintain the highest quality teacher in the classroom. A collaborative working group representative of all education interest groups should work to develop common areas of agreement. The amendment should be implemented in the most economically feasible manner allowing for maximum local school district control. Programs and curriculum (i.e. extracurricular classes, counseling and media services), not covered by the amendment, should not be reduced in either quality or availability by the implementation of the Class Size amendment. Furthermore, Florida's system of higher education should not be diminished in quality or funding as a result of the passage and implementation of the Class Size amendment.

DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

- 1) **Extracurricular Class** -- The determination of what is an "extracurricular class" should best be determined at the local school district level. While physical education, chorus and band may seem to be considered extracurricular, there are differences in how these classes are taught at different grade levels. References to FCAT related courses should not be used in conjunction with this term and classes that support a more complete educational experience for students should also be eligible for class size reduction.
- 2) **Calculation of the Class Size Number** -- A clear standard must be used and students should only be counted once per period or class. Only classroom teachers should be the divisor in this calculation. ESE and ESOL standalone programs should not be included in the calculation resulting from the

amendment. Class size in ESE and ESOL programs should be maintained at levels consistent with providing maximum support for these students.

- 3) **Average Number of Students in Each Classroom** -- This should be applied on a district-wide basis to allow for maximum flexibility. While numbers may vary from school to school, no school should be left behind or excluded when class size reduction is implemented.
- 4) **Classroom Teacher** -- The definition of teacher applicable to the implementation of class size reduction should be as it appears in section, 1012.01(2)(a), Florida Statutes.

1012.01 Definitions

(2) INSTRUCTIONAL PERSONNEL.--"Instructional personnel" means any staff member whose function includes the provision of direct instructional services to students. Instructional personnel also includes personnel whose functions provide direct support in the learning process of students. Included in the classification of instructional personnel are:

(a) Classroom teachers.--Classroom teachers are staff members assigned the professional activity of instructing students in courses in classroom situations, including basic instruction, exceptional student education, career and technical education, and adult education, including substitute teachers.

DATA RELATED ISSUES

Reliable and accurate information needs to be collected as soon as possible to assist in the implementation strategies.

- 1) We need accurate school capacity information. How many student seats and/or classrooms are available school-by-school and composite countywide numbers? How many portable and modular classrooms are being used in each district and what distinguishes a portable classroom from a modular classroom?
- 2) We need class size information on a district-wide average, on a school-wide average, on a school and district-wide average by grade level and on a class-by-class basis in each school.
- 3) The data should be available to measure progress on an annual basis.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

FEA believes that an agenda to implement quality schools and the various components of quality be our top priority. Class Size Reduction (CSR) would be just one such component. In regards to Class Size Reduction, FEA would support the following:

- 1) Targeted policies to reduce class size should be determined at the district level. Emphases should be placed on prekindergarten through 3rd grade, in schools designated as "priority schools" where academic achievement is of critical concern and in schools and classes where research demonstrates greater benefits from reducing class sizes. Implementation of the Class Size

amendment should not diminish nor impair the educational experience for any student.

- 2) Adequate compensation of all public education personnel cannot be sacrificed due to the added cost of implementing the class size amendment. Adequate funds to support both salary increases and recruitment and retention incentives are needed to permit greater flexibility at the district level to adopt compensation strategies that work for that school district. This is especially pertinent to the development of performance pay and other alternative compensation strategies.
- 3) Florida should develop strategies that attempt to provide for equitable and adequate funding across all school districts. This is very important and can be justified when using class size as a strategy for implementing broad-based quality schools reform.
- 4) School districts currently having lower class sizes should not be penalized by the amendment. Flexible use of designated CSR funds and additional incentive funds should be provided to districts that committed to class size reduction prior to the passage of the constitutional amendment.
- 5) Mentoring and induction programs should be developed and used to assist new teachers in advancing their teaching and classroom management skills. Serving as a mentor teacher should be voluntary and appropriate compensation and/or released time should be provided to the mentor teacher. Classes with two teachers should be allowed, as part of the class size reduction methodology, when mentoring is a component of this arrangement.
- 6) Proactive steps are needed to both recruit and retain teachers. The quality of the teacher is crucial to the success of reducing class size. Florida already has an alternative certification process and an adjunct teacher classification so we must make sure they are effective in providing more qualified teachers. Recruitment and retention of teachers is most critical. We must explore ways to keep teachers and not throw them away. Beyond mentoring, we need to provide assistance to teachers and not just non renew them after 97 days. Extending DROP and/or accelerating the timeframe for a retired teacher to return to active employment as well as increasing retirement benefits can retain our current teachers. We need to recruit teachers from employees who are already active in our classrooms such as paraprofessionals and permanent substitutes by offering sabbatical programs and scholarships to provide meaningful ways for these underpaid employees to attain their teaching credentials.
- 7) With the advent of the new federal ESEA statute, paraprofessionals should be encouraged and supported financially to gain teacher certification. Additionally, creative strategies should be developed to use some Title 2 funds to assist with the implementation of the Class Size Reduction amendment.
- 8) Portable classrooms can be utilized when the need of permanent facilities cannot be justified or are not feasible in the short-term.
- 9) School districts, after examining the capacity of their schools, should adopt methods to maximize use of available classroom space.